149; Reinach--84 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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'Europeans are usually immune to attacks by Asiatic cholera and only rarely suffer from its effects.

Smallpox is endemic in Laos. Very few persons above [113] a certain age have escaped this terrible disease, and nearly all the natives bear more or less apparent marks thereof. In the last two years vaccination has been widespread among the Laotian populations and has immunized children and the adults not stricken.

Tubes of vaccine serum are sent to all the provinces of Laos by the Pasteur Institute of Saigon. [Illustration here] Fresh batches are sent every two weeks so that the serum will retain its effectiveness. Since vaccination tours would absorb almost all the time of the three colonial physicians in Laos because of the extent of the country and the slowness of communication, the commissioners who are heads of provinces have trained mandarins as student vaccinators. The latter are supplied with inoculation needles [plumes "vaccinostyles"] and "serum" which is renewed as need arises, and practice vaccination in the interior of the provinces, where they themselves train other pupils. In sum, mutual vaccination is the rule (1).

(1) In Laos as in Cambodia, vaccination is making constant progress.

Lower Laos may be regarded as being almost completely free of smallpox epidemics. It is more difficult to protect Upper Laos. By way of the Mékong the tubes of vaccine sent out by the Pasteur Institute of Saigon used to take eighty days to reach Luang-Prabang, and because of this long delay the vaccine, which only retains its properties for about seventy days, used to lose all its effectiveness by the time it reached its destination. Nowadays the Institute sends the tubes by way of Tonkin (Black River as far as Lai-Chau and from Lai-Chau to Luang-Prabang by tram), and the percentage of successes obtained has considerably increased.

(Report of the Superior Resident.)

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[114] There are also three other afflictions endemic in Laos. These are rheumatic pains, purulent ophthalmia and various skin disorders. The rheumatic pains, which cause the death of a number of individuals every year, generally appear in August and September, that is to say at the end of the period when the ricefields are plowed

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and prepared. This affliction is doubtless due to the Laotian peasants' prolonged stay in the hot and nauseating mud of the ricefields.

Cases of purulent ophthalmia make their appearance between December and March and, in addition to a special predisposition of the race to this disease, its cause must be attributed to the many air currents and drafts which find their way between the walls of houses during the season of great winds.

This affliction, which affects mainly children and adolescents, is aggravated by uncleanliness and by the use of already contaminated bandages. Even the most serious cases of ophthalmia disappear, often within a few days, when treated with boric acid solution or zinc sulphate applied by means of antiseptic cotton wool or gauze.

The skin disorders are leprosy, alopecia, frambesia, prurigo, a variety of watery skin disorders and types of pityriasis, and stubborn sores caused by wounds by sharp weapons, tools or splinters.

At the beginning of 1900 Dr. Janselme of the Saint-Louis Hospital went on a mission in Laos the purpose of which was to diagnose and identify the existing skin disorders as well as to study treatments which might be applied.

[115] Goiter is also quite widespread among the mountainfolk, especially among those who drink water which has flowed over calcareous rock or serpentine. One sees men, women and even children afflicted with monstrous double and triple goiters, the volume of which often exceeds that of a man's head.

Syphilis is also prevalent in Laos. It was imported by Siamese soldiers and is widespread only in the regions where they stayed most. Sufficient proof of this fact is seen in its absence in the regions inhabited by the Khas.

744

Ever since our settlement in Laos the health service has maintained a strict surveillance and its dispensaries have cared for sick persons of both sexes (1).

(1) There are three field infirmaries in Laos directed by Colonial physicians and located at Khong, Vien-Tiane and Luang-Prabang. Unfortunately, the reports sent by these physicians to the head of the health service have not been published.

advised for persons who suffer from any weakness in any of these organs.

Although situated in the tropical zone, Laos has regions where a climate like that of Europe prevails during several months of the year and where Europeans who were fatigued by their stay in the low plains or hot valleys might go each year to recover and regain strength and vigor.

We may mention, among other regions, the plateau of the Bolovens, which is recommended by Dr. Harmand, but especially the plateau of Tran-Ninh and the high valleys of the Hua-Pahn.

In Tran-Ninh and the Hua-Pahn, particularly from November to March, that is to say over a period of five months, the thermometer falls as low as nearly 2° and rarely rises above 25°.

[122] The morning, the late afternoon and evening, and the night are delicious on these plateaus, while the middle of the day is quite similar to springtime in the south of France. The air is healthy and dry, walking is pleasant and the views varied.

There are already European groups in Xieng-Khouang and Muong-Son, since these are province capitals. A few supplementary buildings would be enough to turn them into sanatoriums, without aiming at all that the word implies in the way of equipment, but merely at the establishment of rest spots where officials and colonists from other regions could spend a few months or weeks of healthful vacation time.

5. HEALTH SERVICE

Health service in Laos is in the hands of three colony physicians who direct infirmaries located at Khong, Vien-Tiane and Luang-Prabang.

In each of these infirmaries consultation and hospitalization services are provided for Europeans, civil guards, Annamite and Laotian interpreters and scholars, and for native employees.

The costs are partly paid out of receipts from payments made by the colonists and native employees for each day of treatment and, in Luang-Prabang, out of a levy on the Royal Treasury.

The Khong infirmary is equipped with an ice machine which supplies the needs of the medical service and those of the Europeans in the region, in return for a fee. The Vien-Tiane infirmary was to have received one in 1900, and it is to be hoped that Luang-Prabang will soon be similarly equipped.

Gifts from the family serve as payment for the bonzes. When the prayers are over, flowers and wax candles are added to the gifts. The body is then raised on the shoulders of four pallbearers of good-will and taken to the cemetery, where there are a few ablutions and where the bonzes recite the last prayers before the burial. 764 792

When all is done the persons present take turns throwing branches, earth and stone into the grave, in the belief that these things will preserve the deceased from contact with wet soil and the teeth of animals. The grave, comparatively shallow, is dug two sok (.9 meter) deep for adults and a half sok (.65 meter) deep for children and adolescents. When the cavity has been filled with earth and well tamped down with the feet, the persons present withdraw and all is over forever.

No worship will be practiced for this tomb, and it will soon disappear under a thick blanket of vegetation. Relatives sometimes return, however, after a rainfall if the ground happens to have settled slightly on the very spot of the grave. They then fill up the tomb and build a sort of tumulus above it with flat stones or heavy round rocks.

The custom of throwing into running water the bodies of persons who had died as a result of certain diseases, generally of an epidemic character, used to be practiced in Laos before our arrival there. The inhabitants had no concern for the fatal consequences which such a procedure might have on public health. Since our arrival in the land an absolute prohibition has been issued against throwing any corpse into the watercourses. Nowadays the people are content merely with simulating this custom and with interring bodies after a pretended immersion. 766 744

[202] When the family of the deceased is wealthy or even well-to-do, cremation is the standard procedure. This ceremony is not performed immediately after death is pronounced, but may often be postponed for more than a month either to enable relatives to come from a distance, or to await the settlement of a pending lawsuit, or else the arrival of the fire sent by the sovereign if the deceased is a prince, an official or a man of a certain rank. Wealthy families postpone the date of cremation out of ostentation, for the interval between death and cremation is supposed to be filled with feasts, celebrations and amusements of all kinds which are put on almost continuously for the bonzes, relatives, friends, neighbors and [554] 764

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have any elected councils or parliamentary representation. Today it constitutes one of the five states in the Indo-Chinese union.

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A consequence of the unification of Laos was its division into provinces and the incorporation of its officials, who had heretofore been a staff apart, in the ranks of the Indo-China Civil Service.

The government commissioners have therefore become civil service administrators.

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Today each of the fourteen provinces of Laos is placed under the authority of an Administrator, and the latter is seconded by a civil service clerk.

701

Native guard. In Laos there are no detachments of the troops stationed in Indo-China, but only a native civil guard [278] composed partly of Annamites and partly of Laotians. It constitutes a police force which is distributed in detachments of varying size under the command of inspectors and chief guardsmen. It is entirely at the disposition of the administrators who are heads of provinces. This native guard numbers twenty-seven inspectors and chief guardsmen and 850 men, of which 320 are volunteer Annamite enlisted men recruited in Annam and Tonkin, and 530 are natives recruited from all the races of Laos. It may be called on to lend its support, if the need arise, to the native authorities who are responsible for maintaining order and security in their respective territories. Peace and order are so perfect in Laos, however, that one can go about freely without an escort.

652

The treasury service. The treasury service in Laos is headed by a bursar who holds the title of "Chief Bursar of the Treasury Service in Laos." He handles all matters dealing with receipts, expenditures and treasury operations in Laos in the same forms and according to the same rules as the other bursars who are heads of services in Indo-China.

He is assisted by a deputy bursar.

These two agents reside in Vien-Tiane.

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Medical service. This service includes three colonial physicians on detachment in Laos who are in charge of the infirmaries at Luang-Prabang, Vien-Tiane (formerly at Pak-Hin-Boun) and Khong. They care for all sick persons, whether European or native, as has been noted above (1).

(1) See Chapter III, Health Service.